

## **You Can Be It All**

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“What do you want to be when you grow up?” That’s a question most adults were asked while they were children.

Today’s children are still being asked the same question. Let’s look at what they answer.

Many children mention occupations engaged in by people they admire. In some cases, that’s someone seen on television. In other cases, it’s a parent, a neighbor, a teacher, or a friend’s parent. It’s not unusual for such preferences to be based on just a partial understanding of such work, often the most glamorous portion.

The reality may be far different from what a child’s expectations are. The youngster who wants to act may not know about all the time that may be spent in training and tryouts while working at low-paying jobs to cover the rent.

Far better answers come from youngsters who have experienced a true taste of an occupation . . . and found that they liked the flavor and aroma. Such an experience could come, for instance, from helping a busy chef prepare ingredients for a restaurant’s meals during an internship.

Experience can be a most reliable guide when a youngster finds something marvelous to do that provides lifetime delight . . . such as learning how to perform highly appealing activities.

While thinking about how youthful experiences can transform a life, I was reminded of Dr. Claudette Etienne, who holds a Ph.D. degree in German literature from Rushmore University. Let me share a little of her story to help you learn from her experiences.

German literature was probably not on her mother’s mind while she visited a seamstress on Mauritius (an island nation in the Indian Ocean, located east of Madagascar) for a dress fitting. The event was significant, however, because Ms. Claudine Laridon brought along her oldest daughter, young Claudette, then aged two-and-a-half.

While the fitting occurred, Dr. Etienne was allowed to visit the pre-primary school taught by the seamstress's daughter. Delighted by the experience, she refused to leave the school after her mother's fitting. Her mother let her stay and headed home to prepare a lunch pack.

Dr. Etienne reports that she discovered a love for learning that day . . . and she hasn't stopped learning since then.

You might expect that the next big event in her life would be moving to Germany, having a brilliant German teacher, or falling in love with a German exchange student. Not so.

This is a love story, but not of that kind. It's a story about true devotion to learning and where its delights can lead you.

Dr. Etienne's life took a direction, instead, that may surprise you.

As you can imagine from her passion for learning, she was a good student and would have answered the question about what she wanted to do as an adult as "practicing law." Unfortunately, there was no way to study for that profession on Mauritius, and her family could not afford to send her for the necessary off-island education.

She stayed on Mauritius, taking shorthand and typing classes to qualify for secretarial work. Becoming quite adept at applying her skills in English and French, she was selected to be a reporter for international conferences held on the island.

Dr. Etienne later joined the police department, working as a constable in the personnel department. While there, she met her future husband who was a chief inspector.

Seven years later, she became a senior clerk at the Central Water Authority. She gained promotions there, becoming Public Relations Officer nine years later.

At this point, German finally entered Dr. Etienne's life. In 1983, she began studying the language, inspired by a German song she had heard and her brother having married a German-speaking Swiss woman. By 1985, she

had passed the German Ordinary level examination with distinction. Subsequently, she also passed the German Advanced level examination.

Later in 1985, she visited Switzerland for the first time. While discovering that she could understand a little German, she gained a strong desire to know more. In 1986, a niece asking for tutoring help with German, providing a new incentive to learn more.

The niece started doing well, and other classmates sought Dr. Etienne's help. As a result, she began regular tutoring in German during the evenings.

Noticing that her facility in German was improving, she began a college-level distance-learning program in German that only provided a list of texts, a syllabus, and copies of past examinations. Succeeding in such a course wasn't easy.

After rising at 5 A.M. each workday, Dr. Etienne would organize her household and tend to her full-time job until 5 P.M. She would then take care of her family and tutor until 10 P.M., then switching to German studies until 2 A.M.

In 1994, she was ready to take the first German examinations for her college degree. Just a few days before the exams were scheduled, her husband passed away. Despite being almost totally distracted by this personal loss, she hung in there, took the exams, and managed to pass.

Her college German studies continued until 1998, when she earned a B.A. with Honours. Dr. Etienne was delighted to be able to attend the university's graduation ceremonies in London. Soon thereafter, she was asked to be Examiner for oral German examinations by the University of Cambridge and Reader for comprehension examinations by the University of London in Mauritius.

Three years later, Dr. Etienne retired early from the Central Water Authority and began teaching German at St. Nicholas Secondary School, where she continued teaching for the next nine years. In addition, she became a part-time lecturer in German at the University of Technology (Mauritius) and the University of Mauritius. When not teaching, she did translations.

While she wanted to study more German, she couldn't afford formal courses while supporting her three sons in their college studies. When her twin sons gained scholarships for advanced studies in France, she was finally able to act on her dream and begin studying for a Ph.D. in German literature.

She was now retired from full-time work and well into her sixties. Many people would have been mostly focused on relaxing and visiting their grandchildren. Not so with Dr. Etienne!

She continued to teach three days a week for three hours at the University of Technology and the University of Mauritius. Fortunately, she was blessed by this schedule with unaccustomed leisure time so that the new studies didn't have to come at the expense of her sleep. Consequently, the studies were even more enjoyable than before.

The experience brought many unanticipated delights. As her understanding of German literature expanded, so did her ability to understand why people behaved as they did. Further, such insights made history and current events more accessible and interesting by providing her with expanded perspectives. In addition, her writing improved . . . in both German and in English.

Dr. Etienne also gained a passion for writing critical analyses and studies of German literature textbooks. Having earned her doctorate by studying some pretty depressing stories, she now allows herself the joy of reading happier books and stories. She continues her university-teaching schedule.

As you can see from Dr. Etienne's example, living a dream often provides novel experiences that can deliver even more joy than expected . . . at any stage in life.

What is keeping you from fulfilling a dream that's dear to you? Can learning more about something help to bring your dream to reality? Do you have some time to spare for such preparations?

Now is a good time to find out how you can qualify for what you would love to do in the most efficient and satisfying ways. Learning to do what appeals to you has never been easier.

Be like Dr. Etienne at two-and-a-half. Start learning now!

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